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Los Angeles Times Magazine



Against the Tide

*Long before he became
Mr. Pia Zadora, Meshulam Riklis
was making waves as the original
corporate raider*

A Portrait of Don Bachardy/Ferries: Gracious Survivors/Saving Santa Monica Bay

FERRY TALES

**Since the 1930s, Ferry Services in California Have Dwindled
From 80 or So to Fewer Than 30. Some of the Survivors.**

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY TOM ZIMMERMAN



However people pass the time waiting for the Balboa Island Ferry, above, based in Newport Beach, few pull out a book once they're on board. For one thing, the entire trip from Balboa Peninsula to the island is about 1,000 feet; for another, the sweep of hills to the southeast and the broad bay full of private boats to the east and the north hold their attention. The small-town quality of the 82-year-old ferry—most of the operators and deckhands know all the islanders—sets it apart from many of its cousins. The top fare, 55 cents, buys a spot for car and driver, but other forms of transportation ferried—bikes, surfboards, strollers and skateboards—are nearly as common.

DURING THE 1920s, two gracious steamships, the Avalon and the Catalina, served "the Enchanted Isle"; their arrivals were greeted by bands and local children diving for coins.

Today, there are about 70 cruises to Santa Catalina each week during the summer and about 25 during the off-season, departing from San Pedro, Long Beach and Newport. The most romantic ride is the last departure of the evening from the island.

Avalon dissolves into darkness in the ship's wake, and the coast, from Palos Verdes to Dana Point, spreads out in front in a jumble of lights. Right, a ferry leaves Catalina for the mainland; top right, a commuter ferry in San Francisco.

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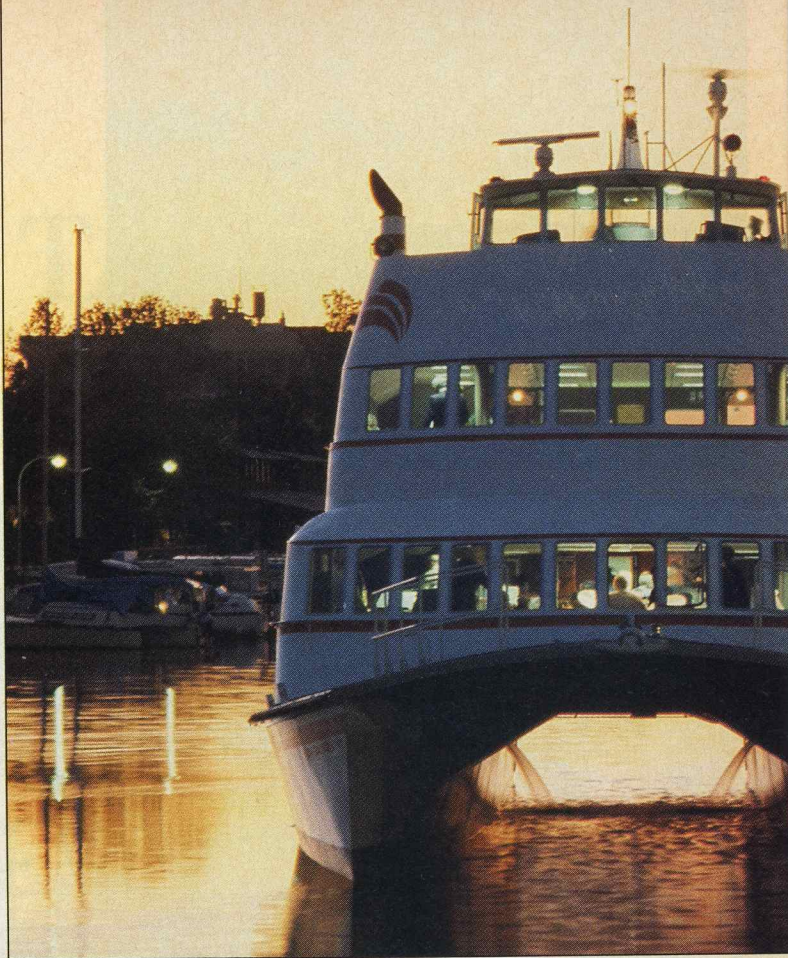


FERRY TALES

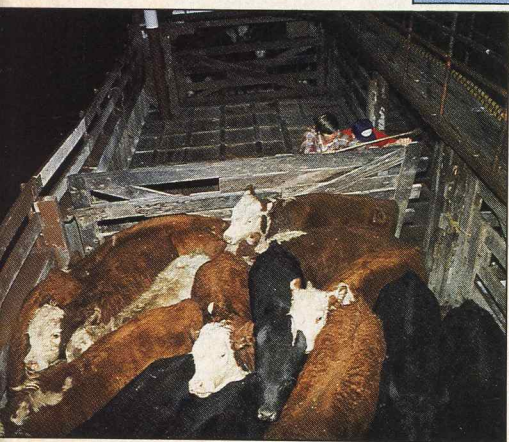
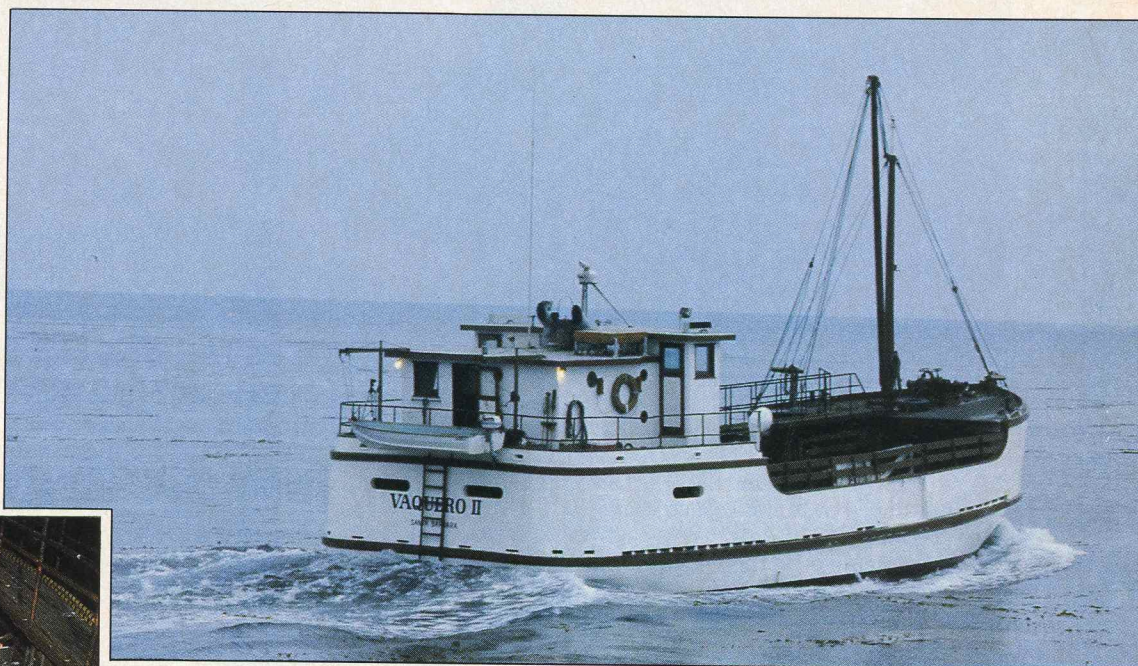
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On the last run of the day from Tiburon to San Francisco aboard the high-speed—30 m.p.h.—ferry M/V CataMarin, right, the air is cool, the world smells fresh, and the trip across the bay is sensual:

Intermittent clouds mottle the water; shards of sunlight strike Sausalito; a single ray illuminates a cell block on Alcatraz. Tiburon and Angel Island are in shadow. But the passengers are not along just for the views. They're commuters. The CataMarin is part of the complex transportation system serving the San Francisco Bay Area. The Red & White Fleet, a private ferry company, connects the city with Sausalito, Tiburon, Vallejo and Alcatraz and Angel islands; at far right, a ferry leaves from Angel Island. The Red & White also offers trips from San Francisco to Stockton via the San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The Golden Gate Ferry System, which is run by the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, connects San Francisco with Sausalito and Larkspur in Marin County.



The more than 1,000 miles of waterway in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta make conventional travel difficult, though there are about 70 bridges and at least two public ferries. Levees keep the rivers out of the reclaimed farmland, and the people who live here adjust their lives to the water-locked area. The Victory II, left, based at Bradford Island, is a free-running ferry (one that doesn't run on a cable); instead, it's steered by a large wheel, and looks like something that Samuel Clemens might have used on the Mississippi. It runs the False River hourly between Webb Tract and Bradford and Jersey islands, serving hunters and property owners as well as truckers transporting grain and produce through the area during harvests. The Real McCoy, which crosses Cache Slough between Rio Vista and Ryer Island, is the only other free-running ferry in the Delta.



Not all ferries transport two-legged passengers. In the fall and winter, the Vaquero II loads up at the Port Hueneme cattle pens and takes recently weaned calves on a five-hour trip to Santa Rosa Island, above and right. They graze there for 18 months and then make the return trip to the mainland. In addition, the Vaquero II hauls supplies to the human residents of Santa Rosa year-round; all the Channel Islands are dependent on such service. The Catalina Freight Line helps stock that island's stores, hotels and restaurants. Trailers full of food, gasoline, lumber, engines, cars and other necessities are jockeyed onto a barge that's then towed to Catalina by tugboat, a four-hour trip; departure from Wilmington depends on the tides. □